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"INDIANS AND THE CITY"

TRANSCRIPTION

OF AN ADDRESS

BY THE

HONOURABLE ARTHUR LAING

MINISTER OF INDIAN AFFAIRS AND NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT

TO THE

MEETING OF THE INDIAN-ESKIMO ASSOCIATION


AT WINNIPEG

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 8, 1966.

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Mr. Chairman, honoured guests at the head table and Ladies and Gentlemen:

I want first of all to thank Mr. Oliphant for his very kind introduction of myself and his prior assurance of how bad I am going to be tonight. I was in Ottawa yesterday about 10:00 a.m., left there I think at 11:00 a.m., went to Vancouver last night with a delegation of Japanese Ministers where we had a dinner that I thought would last an hour and a half and instead I got home at midnight.

I picked up a cold the day before. I think I have had to do as much plane riding as most Ministers of the Crown and probably more and I can't stand the things and my ears are sore and my head is sore. However, I am not going to let that deter me from giving you some views on how I think the Department is operating and how we should conduct ourselves in the future, although it may take me a considerably greater time to tell you than it would if I did not have a very heavy cold.

I want particularly to thank the Indian-Eskimo Association for this invitation and I am delighted to be here. I am delighted to see that you have brought together a very large number of people for discussion of a subject with which a great many of these people had to make themselves interested, because we have here a great number of people who are subtracting something from their time, a great deal from their energy and probably something from their pocket in order to attend. I want to tell you that I appreciate that very, very much indeed.

I am also appreciative of the fact that you have here tonight some nine of the Eskimo people I think some from Igloolik, if I am not incorrect, and we appreciate their presence here. These remarkably fine people from the north are, I think, showing the way to participating, as good Canadians, in the things that go on about them in their improvement by education which they now very much want and generally to bring their standards up so they can look other Canadians in the eye and say "I am a Canadian too", and it is important, I think, that you have brought them here.

I have heard already in the short time that I have been here, that this has been quite the best meeting that the Indian-Eskimo Association has ever had. I hear this on all sides. I hear that you have put away a great deal of theory and you have dealt with a great deal of practicality and I hope that this is so. You have been discussing how we are going to translate the person on a reserve into the city and take his rightful place in the city and become a Canadian, economically as well as politically. Well I'm going to deal with that a little later.

I don't know how long ago it was since I addressed the Indian-Eskimo Association in Toronto but just before that, I was in the Yukon country, which I have the responsibility of administering through the Commissioner of the Yukon, when I saw an Indian reserve on the outskirts of Whitehorse that I didn't think very much of and I said a number of things about it. I was told by the Indian Affairs Branch that, that was all the money they had to do this particular job and they were lucky being able to do that job - it was a water system, set up on stilts, a glorious tank where people had to come as much as five or six hundred yards with a bucket to pick up water and how many of you know what the weather is like around Whitehorse in the middle of winter? These people, no doubt, under that system were taking home a little, hard piece of ice by the time they got to the house. Now whether that had anything to do with the Prime Minister suggesting that I had the responsibility for Eskimos and I had better take Indians as well, I don't know. If it did I'm sorry, because I would like to do something for Indian people but not on a basis like that.

We are reputed to have done a very good job with Eskimo people in the north. Now, I am not prepared to agree with that - I don't think that we have done very much so far, but I do insist with you that it's a very, very difficult problem to be a great deal of help or to bring these communities together, because we have Eskimo communities at latitude 82, some of them with only 50 or 60 people, without any connection or communication with the next adjacent settlements, which may be hundreds of miles away except when the odd

plane comes through or service comes through once a year to deliver the annual food allotments for the area. And then the ships don't always get through. Up there we have to have air drops of food in order to keep the people over the winter.

Now, we don't have that situation in southern Canada, but before I try to deal with the subject that you have been dealing with, I want to tell you a true story. When Mr. Battle came into my office first, I said to him "What are the reserves worth?". He said, "Oh my gosh, you're not going to sell them?". I said, "No, on the contrary, but I would like to see something done with them". You see I have an Indian reservation in my own riding in the City of Vancouver. If you were to ask me what it was worth, I would guess between 15 and 20 million dollars. There is a reserve in the City of North Vancouver, if you were to ask me what it was worth, I would say from 80 to 100 thousand dollars an acre, because it's Vancouver water frontage, the water frontage of the port of Vancouver. I found in most of those reserves, included in my Riding, that apart from the fact that a golf club holds a 75-year lease on part of it, that it was sustaining only a number of Indian houses not of very high class. I thought that surely we could get some development if not by the Indian himself then by some whitemen to return us some money for those magnificent lands and get them into some sort of production. I think the thing of which I am a little proud that I have done in the short time that I have been Minister, is that we are getting under way pretty effective surveys of these lands to determine the land-use policy in respect of these reserves.

I don't know how many of you are aware, but there are 6 million acres of reservation lands in Canada. I have heard various estimates as to their value were they free lands fit for sale. Those estimates are in the nature of 800 to 900 millions of dollars and some people say quite in excess 1 billion dollars. In any case, there are many of those lands which today are within cities of Canada that have grown enormously in value because of the growth of the cities. Some of these lands trace their history back to the

ancient treaties that were written, some were allotments made in much later years, but this is the Indian reservation system of Canada.

I was born on Sea Island at the mouth of the Fraser River which is now the Vancouver International Airport, occupying almost all of the island of 3,200 acres. I think that I am one of the very, very few people in the City of Vancouver who know that there is an Indian reserve on that Island. Forty-five acres at the northwest corner of that Island is Indian reservation, belonging to the Musqueam Reserve that is across the north arm of the Fraser in what used to be Point Grey - what is today Vancouver City. Many of these lands have not produced anything. I am quite certain that in the minds of most white people they are regarded as ghetto property upon which the white man didn't go and off which the Indian shouldn't come and we built up this total inattention to one another in respect of our persons and our values across the years that has brought us to this very difficult question at the present time. I am quite certain that an ordinary white investor would say "Why, if that were private land, of course I could do fantastic things with it. This is Indian land you can't do anything with Indian land. Stay away from it". Now we intend to change all that and we intend to change all that as rapidly as we possibly can. And I set out to tell Mr. Battle that it was my wish that we didn't sell a square inch of any Indian reserve but we must develop all of them as rapidly as we possibly can.

You have been discussing here the Indian leaving the reserve and going into the city. I'm not sure that all Indians or the preponderance of Indians should leave the reserve and go into the city. These reserves were set aside on the basis that they were Indian lands for the benefit of Indians. Some of them are agricultural, some of them are forest, some of them have minerals and very valuable minerals on them. I am going to pay some attention to the fact that there is a very heavy demand at present for a survey of the history of the allocation of Indian lands - in other words there is an Indian Claims Commission to which the Government of Canada is committed and we shall have sooner or later an Indian Claims Commission. At present I am holding it

up on the specific request of the Indians of my home Province of British Columbia who want to discuss first the British Columbia land question before we go to the Indian Claims Commission. There is a wide feeling among certain Indians that they have been robbed of land and that they got insufficient amounts.

If I am to believe what is being said by the Native Brotherhood of the Province of British Columbia, we are in grave danger of losing the City of Victoria. Now there are certain people in the City of Victoria that I wouldn't mind getting lost, but I don't want to lose the City of Victoria. In any event, there are these questions, of course that deal with and go back to the historic position of the Indian lands. It was the thought of the Government at that time, and acquiesced in I think by the Indians who lived in those days, that these lands would either be sufficient or insufficient to keep them in a good livelihood. Now it hasn't worked out that way, and then you say well now we have got to make some preparation for the Indian that leaves the reserve.

You know, Mr. Chairman, what is worrying me is why does the Indian leave the Reserve? Why does he want to go into the City? Why does he want to cut the tie and call it quits and go down the road? I ask myself above all, "What shape is he in to cut the tie and go down the road?" Not all of them are ready by any means, though quite a number are leaving because they think they have the education to take their part in the city and compete with other people or, indeed, they have the education. But there are many instances in my Province of British Columbia where they are coming into Vancouver today where they must be leaving the reserve because they are completely fed up and they are going down the road to anything other than this. I ask you what sort of shape is that to go into a competitive position in the city with the white man whose city is natural to him and the Indian's is not.. What I am suggesting to you is that I think over the larger part of the field we've got to go back to the people on the individual reserves and find out what's wrong there. Certainly, many of them will go to the city some day and we had better straighten out ourselves and themselves on the reserve before they go down the road and before they get to the city. I think so.

We, in recent years, in Canada - probably some of it is remorse - probably some of it is shame - have come to the general conclusion that we've done a very, very bad job by our indigenous people. We haven't treated them right, it's dreadful, we've got to do something about it. I would think that a Minister of Indian Affairs could go into the House of Commons today and come out with a pretty good chunk of money. I did last year and I think we could do it again. Most members of the House of Commons today will support a very healthy budget for Indian Affairs. "Tell us what you want and we'll give you the money". It's been a bad job that we were doing.

Canada's interesting itself, of course, in the improvement of so-called emerging countries on other sides of the world and we are putting an increasing amount of our substance annually in those emerging countries. I think there is some awareness on the part of some Canadians at least, that in many instances those who we are assisting in those emerging countries are further ahead than some Canadians that live in Canada.

Finally, we have decided as a people to say "Well, we want to do right by the Indian people". So, bring us your plan and we will vote the money. We got a commitment without a great deal of difficulty for the expenditure of 112 million dollars over five years on the reservations for the improvement of a water supply and sewage supply and the building of houses. I am going to confess to you right now that in the first year of our operations, we are running behind. We are not spending as much as we should be spending because there is indifference. Part of it on the reserves, part of it all along the line - the chain is not complete yet but we are doing pretty well. There have been in the past few months a great number of reservations on which we put electrical power for the first time. A great number of them - 25 or 30, I would say - on which we have put water facilities and sewage facilities for the first time. We are building roads and so on and better communications and increasing health affairs and it is not my fault, nor is it any credit to me, because this plan has been evolved over the past three or four years under Ministers who are other than I, and the Department has been working assiduously because we have been paying some attention to what is called poverty in Canada.

Personally, I think we are talking too much about poverty. There should not be any poverty in a country like this. None at all. We are getting the impression that poverty is a pretty widespread condition among Canadians and it is not true. But there are conditions in Canada with a limited number of people that cry out for immediate change and this we should do, of course. So we are going to upgrade the reserves. Not all of them have value because some of them, in remote areas, partly because of lack of communication, partly because they are more geology than they are soil, are of very, very little value indeed, and we are talking now about moving some of these people from some of those reserves to other reserves.

I am quite certain that we shall be able to show in a very short time a considerable improvement in the operation of reserves that lie close to cities or within cities. One of the brightest spots of all is the sudden emergence of Indian people themselves who say "We don't want the white man to develop our reserves, we can do it ourselves", and we have one or two in British Columbia today who are doing it themselves. One Band recently went to a corporation and negotiated an arrangement in respect of \$500,000 for the building of houses on the reserve. Not the Indian Department, no white men at all, an Indian went to the company and said, "we are calling tenders", as a matter of fact he got five or six tenders. On that particular reserve we are using other agencies of government and have placed one, the C.M.H.C., in a mortgage position as long as I guarantee that the money will someday be paid. I am not concerned about that at all because that reserve is worth 10 or 20 million dollars.

Now then, if we can just get a few Indians who say "I can be as bright a businessman as the next fellow", and show a reserve that is well-organized and well developed, and bring other people to say this can be done and we did it ourselves and I think we would be making very real progress indeed. I have been saying in British Columbia, that you go ahead and do this and say these things and organize these things and you will probably make mistakes. Well I have also said to the people there, "I'd sooner see you make mistakes than do nothing; because out of your mistakes you are going to find that there are certain limitations to business and requirements in

business and indeed at present in British Columbia, we have at least a dozen and a half Indian people who are as competent in the business field as any other people. I have been saying since I had responsibility for the Eskimo people that there is no race of people in the world genetically inferior to another and the sooner we realize that and say that given like conditions all people indeed are equal in their capacity. It seems to me that we will get on that much more rapidly in the world on a better frame if this is done.

Now, then to return to your subject. What do we do with the Indian that goes down the road? I'm concerned that so many of them are going down the road and into the city too soon. We want the Provinces and we want the municipalities, in other words we want Canadians, to say this is a fellow citizen, he has all the rights that I do, he is capable of handling himself as I, and yet this is going to be very, very difficult and I imagine you have been agreeing among yourselves while you are here that it is a very difficult situation. You see when I speak to some Indian people, they say "get rid of your, I won't use some of the adjectives, Indian Act". Get rid of that and destroy that horrible thing called wardship. Let us be free. Then when we make some certain moves in that direction, because of the unpleasant history of the past, there comes back to the Indian the thought then, what about the treaty? We had better not cut the lifeline, we had better not shear it all off, we had better retain the ancient commitment. We might have to go back to the reserve. This is the position it seems to me in which so many of these younger people that you have been talking about find themselves in today. They are torn between retaining the lifeline and setting out anew.

We have been saying too that the Provinces should step in. We have had pretty fair new co-operation from most of the provinces and I want to make that official. There is wide opinion among provinces about their responsibility to Indians but in general they feel they have an obligation to these people because they are citizens of the province as well as of the Nation. The municipalities are I think, saying the same thing. But, there is also an opinion that here you - the national government historically admitted

that the Indian is your responsibility and now you are trying to fluff him off on us. Some people are saying that and some of them think that too. I am not certain, you know, but that we have a continuing responsibility when the Indian moves to the city, but I am terribly concerned over the fact that you keep chasing after people before even they make an error to be sure they don't make one. I don't think that is good for people.

One of your leaders told me this year, "We like the way you talk and we think you are going to do alright, but there is one thing you have to do; you have got to cut out destroying my people by giving hand-outs for nothing". That is what he said. I am shocked to come in here this afternoon and find out that there has been quoted here that 38% of the Indian people in Canada are on relief. This is pretty dreadful. Something has gone wrong somewhere, for that should not obtain in a country like this, because on a per capita basis, ladies and gentlemen, we are undisputedly the richest national in the world.

Well, I am showing my ignorance. I do not know at this stage what to do in respect of the people who move into the cities. I think the municipalities, at least, and probably the provinces have a claim upon us to support financially the work that they are doing within the settlements. Because if the man stayed on the reserve, he would surely be our responsibility and by merely getting off it to become a citizen which we say we want him to do, would seem not to remove us from some financial responsibility. We are now spending about 100 million dollars on the Indian Department per year. A great sum of money. If we were to project the average production of Canadians, the Gross National Produce of Canadians, we should assume that the production of Indians per year should be in the nature of 500 million or one-half of a billion dollars. Instead of that, we go to Parliament and ask for 100 million dollars a year to support Indians.

I think I know where some of the wrong was done. It was in the lack of appreciation of the value of the reserves, particularly those which are today extremely valuable. I have seen magnificently valuable property cut to pieces because a white man wanted to come in and rent an acre or two

acres in the middle of them for 5 or 10 dollars a year and he got it for 30 years. I saw rental of an extremely valuable property in greater Vancouver, it might as well be in Vancouver City because it is just across the shore in West Vancouver. The lease was given on that property for 80 years. Do you know that Vancouver is not 80 years old? If the property were free property today, it would sell for between 20 and 30 thousand dollars an acre, and I am quite certain that 80 years ago you could have bought it for 50 cents an acre. I want to put a little bit of business into the Indian Department and I hope you don't mind if I do. I hope that the Indian people come along and see the magnificent opportunities that lie here and assume the responsibility of developing these reserves, so that money can come to the Indian people and they can do it just as effectively as we, probably better, because they are living on the land and know what can be done with it.

I shall be watching very carefully the effect of this conference. I understand it has been an exceptionally good one and a number of papers have been given. I hear you sir (Walter Currie), conducted a group of people, I think it was in a seminar, in which more enlightenment was brought to this problem than has ever happened before in gatherings of this kind and we as a responsible division of Government are going to study very, very closely everything that was said here.

I have asked so many people in Canada where should the Indian go? Does he get lost in all the other Canadians because he is only 1% or a little more than 1% of the Canadian population? I have had 30 or 40 different kinds of answers. I am quite certain that the indifference of the white people a few years ago, 20 or 30 years ago, is based on the assumption, that if you do nothing about him, the Indian will either die or go away. The Indian has done neither. He is very much here and in greater numbers than ever before, and I think on the average he is an infinitely improved man to any time in the past; but it is the extremes that are showing in Canada today and call out for meetings such as yours, the putting together of the best information that we can and thereafter action. I am going to tell you that we will study most carefully the recommendations that you make, all the papers that were given and we will

move to accomplish those things which our officers, after their presence here and their study with you, think are feasible.

I do want to thank the people in the friendship centres in a number of Canadian cities today who are doing magnificent work in meeting people who come with very little competence to come to the cities and many of them are that way. I met a gentleman here tonight from the Edmonton centre whom I saw there a few months ago. I was with Mr. George Prud'homme at the time and Mr. Prud'homme told me that he had been driving along the street where the bus terminal was the night before and there was an Indian family of six there with a couple of bundles, and they didn't know where to go at all. They came in from the reserve on a bus and were dumped there. They had no knowledge of the city at all, no understanding of where they could have spent that night let alone succeeding nights, but they had become so fed up with the reserve and what was going on in that particular area they decided to go down the road even if the road was unknown.

Now these are situations which in Canada with our affluence at present call for some solutions and unless the solutions be right, the expenditure of increasing amounts of money could actually do more harm than good and you are aware of that as well as I. I think that we can get adequate sums of money to do a job properly if we know what is the proper thing to do, but I am going to continue to say to you that we have no money to waste on Indian Affairs, or any other Department of Government. Governments get their money, you know, the same place that everyone else gets it - out of taxpayers' pockets - because no government has any money of its own, or it had better not for long and it is imperative, therefore, that we treat taxpayers' money with some considerable attention. We will continue to do that, but if you can give us solutions that are manifestly adequate to meet the situation, I think that we can find the money to implement them.

I thank you very, very much for your attention.

